

Highlights

Rapid Financial Results; Lasting Cultural Change

BFO began playing the Great Game of Business at the start of 2014, beginning with financial literacy training combined with a weekly company-wide huddle where they discussed the financials, updates to the sales and marketing pipeline, and the status of their current accounts.

Infusing that level of awareness and financial acumen throughout the organization has had an impact on the company's financial health in several ways. Not only has growth been solid, but the firm has also been able to diversify in a way it might not have been able to in the past.

Earlier this year, BFO decided to make a tough decision as a team to fire one of their largest, and most problematic, clients. But they needed to then pivot their business to survive.

"By opening the books and getting our team engaged in finding new revenue and cutting costs, we turned what could have been a catastrophic drop in revenue into a healthy, cost-cutting exercise, and our team's focus on finding new revenue led us to record sales numbers in Q1," says Golden. "I'm most excited about where we're going next, and how we can leverage the full brainpower of our team to make important business decisions."

Playing the Great Game of Business has also impacted the firm's culture, especially the level of engagement and communication that's activated in the company's weekly huddles. Prior to opening their books, associates in both the sales and service teams struggled to understand how they actually impacted the business. Today, everyone understands how he or she plays a role in driving the company's two critical numbers – net margin and net income before tax.

"New employees are impressed by our level of openness, and existing employees appreciate another level of involvement," says Krull. "I love hearing how our people now ask, 'Wait, how will this affect our profit?'"



Organizational Background

Be Found Online (BFO) is a Chicago-based digital marketing agency that delivers organic media, paid media, local search, and digital analytics solutions to medium-sized and enterprise-level businesses. BFO's roots date back to 2009 when its two founders, Dan Golden (now President), and Steve Krull (CEO) left their big agency careers to create a more nimble and vibrant working environment. The company discovered the Great Game of Business based on its interest in the so-called "gamification" of business.

"I came from a company where I felt like a cog in a giant machine, where I never knew what was going on. It was shocking to me when I got here that the whole company went over the financial information once a week. We also get the chance to have a say and add suggestions for how to make money. It's very cool being part of a company that wants your feedback, and for you to know what's going on."

~ Kelly Hogan, Marketing Manager

Playing the Game Together

One of the big moves the BFO team made in 2016 was to roll out the High Involvement Planning process inside the business. While things didn't always go smoothly, going through the exercise pushed the team to get beyond theoretical plans and create actual plans and numbers together much earlier in the planning process than they had done in the past.

The BFO team also came together to rethink their bonus program in the wake of deciding to break from their formerly key client, who represented 41% of their revenue. Knowing the bottom line of the business was going to take a hit, the team found a creative solution to funding the bonus program. If the team could win enough new business to essentially break even without counting any revenues they earned from their problematic partner, any money that came from that partner would go straight into the bonus pool.

While the team did not earn their Q1 bonus, they are now much closer to achieving their year-end goals than they originally thought possible.

“I appreciate that I no longer have to feel weird about asking questions. The Great Game of Business gives me the forum and the freedom to ask questions. I believe that the more open you are with your people, in good times and bad, the better results you will get because everyone is united.”

~ Beth Spiegel, Vice President of Business Intelligence and Strategic Planning

What's Next?

While the BFO team has had some success playing MiniGames, particularly one tied to generating new leads and prospects and converting them into paying customers, the team sees lots of opportunities to kick off more games that are tied to driving their critical numbers.

BFO is also focused on improving its HIP process and getting more people involved around the business involved in the process.
